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UNCLAS KABUL 002431

DEPT FOR AFGHAN ELECTIONS TASK FORCE

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: Afghan Elections Situation Report Two - 1200 Local, August 20, 2009

¶1. (SBU) PRT and local media reporting suggest Afghan voters and officials are hoping for the best while preparing for the worst. Many voters may wait to see if violence erupts early in the day before deciding whether to go to the polls. Yet, PRTs report optimism in unexpected places-Kunar, for example, where 121 women have registered to help staff polling sites. IEC has released its final list of 6519 polling centers. The next sitrep is scheduled for 0400 local on August 20.

Security

¶2. (SBU) Post raised at a high level the issue of the GIROA ban on reporting violent incidents, while private media outlets announced they would report in spite of it. COMISAF has instructed regional commanders not/not to distribute voting materials to districts without an ANSF presence. In the event that local authorities themselves distribute materials to such districts, ISAF forces will report the grid coordinates of the districts to IEC.

¶3. (SBU) IEC Chairman Dr. Najafi separately told Emboffs that delivery of sensitive materials is proceeding smoothly with no major incidents, and he repeated his assertion that only Polling Centers (PCs) with ANA and/or ANP security will receive materials. Emboffs mentioned that ballots were delivered to a PC in Paktika's Azra district, where there were no IEC employees, nor ANA or ANP presence and that the ballots were seized by armed militia. Najafi's answer was categorical: any materials mistakenly delivered to a PC without ANA and/or ANP security and IEC employees will automatically be annulled and the results will not be tabulated.

¶4. (SBU) IEC Chairman Dr. Najafi told Emboffs that he was not satisfied with Global security procedures at IEC headquarters and complained about some of the security decisions made by Global. COMMENT: It appeared to Emboffs that Dr. Najafi did not fully understand some of the security requirements necessary to protect the compound and briefings would be needed to help keep him abreast of necessary procedures. END COMMENT. Provincial reports by region follow:

Regional Command (RC) - North

-- JOWZJAN: ANP have confirmed the murder of Jowzjan Provincial Council candidate Mawlawi Abdul Rahim, who was pulled from his vehicle two days ago by unknown assailants along the road between Aqcha and Murdian districts of Jowzjan province. Rahim was an independent candidate.

-- FARYAB: In Ghormach district, Faryab, the ANP headquarters came under rocket attack around 6:30pm. Four ANP were killed and at least one was wounded. This will impact ANSF's ability to transport

voting materials to the polling centers before polls are scheduled to open.

RC-South

-- HELMAND: In a security shura convened by Helmand Governor Mangal, UK Task Force Helmand Commanding General Radford conveyed the UK assessment of "enormous intimidation" throughout Helmand Province, while MEB Commanding General, BGen Larry Nicholson cited the IEC's impressive role in preparing Helmand for the election despite obvious security challenges. BGen Nicholson warned of the possible use of ANP uniforms by Taliban fighters to infiltrate polling sites, after Marines found ANP uniforms during their operations.

-- KANDAHAR: In Kandahar, threats and voter intimidation continue throughout the province, but especially in the Kandahar City area. Kandahar PRT received reports that insurgents visited mosques at prayer time and warned locals not to participate in the election. Night letters warning against voting were also distributed in the city and its environs, while the police reported that shops began to close this afternoon. They are not expected to reopen until after election day. Afghan security forces report that from 1600 August 19 through the evening of August 20, they would stop all vehicles in Kandahar City not displaying special passes allowing them travel in the city.

-- KANDAHAR: Around 10pm an IEC attack occurred at a checkpoint near a polling station in Spin Boldak district, Kandahar. Four Border Police and one civilian are reported killed. An investigation is underway to determine if the target was the polling station or the checkpoint itself.

-- URUZGAN: Intense fighting between ISAF elements and insurgents in Deh Rawud district of Uruzgan contrasts with the relative calm of Tarin Kowt, where bazaars were full today. However, the Uruzgan Principal Election Officer (PEO) reported that all election materials have been distributed throughout the province and are in the custody of IEC officials and either ANP or ANA officers.

RC-East

-- KHOSR: In Khost province, where all voting materials have been safely delivered to polling centers, the security chiefs have received 157 threatening calls - 13 specifically from insurgents threatening ANSF commanders. Several of the calls yielded useful information and leads on IED locations.

Voting & Counting Activities

15. (U) In Farah province in RC-West, 29 polling centers in Pur Chaman district have yet to receive election materials. Twenty-five thousand voters are affected. ISAF will fly materials to the District Center at first light on August 20, and is trying to confirm that IEC can get the materials moved from the District Center to polling centers in time for the opening of the polls.

Voter Turnout

16. (SBU) Voting materials not yet at polling centers and security threats both have the potential to depress voter turnout. Several provinces report insurgent threats to voters.

RC-South

-- KANDAHAR: Kandahar PRT's best estimate is that voter participation in Kandahar province will be somewhere between 20% and 40%. Areas perceived to have better security, i.e., parts of Kandahar City and Dand, Daman, and Spin Boldak districts, will likely have the highest participation. PRT expects many potential voters will stay indoors early in the day and assess the security situation before deciding whether to vote. The PRT anticipates meaningful female participation to be low, due to security concerns, the influence of male family members, high levels of illiteracy

among women, and a general lack of information about the voting process.

-- ZABUL: In Zabul, increased attacks in Shajoy (the largest population center in the province) may deter voter turnout in that district.

RC-East

-- KUNAR: At the Women's Center in Asadabad, Kunar the director had registered 121 women to help staff the polling site. Locals there and at other sites were optimistic about turnout, the candidacy of Karzai (the provincial favorite), and the fact that these were Afghan-run elections where their votes would count. Polling sites were still awaiting expected IEC representatives with ballot materials at 1700 local. In Shingal district, Night Letters distributed the evening before were countered today by a message from the District Governor to the mosques for people to not be afraid and intimidated and to get out and vote.

-- NURISTAN: UNDP reports there will be no voting in Waygul, Nuristan. ANP judge they cannot safely leave the district center to escort materials and guard polling sites. This will impact an estimated 12,998 registered voters from Waygul. Combined with the August 18 destruction of election materials, reported burned en route to Mandol district, an estimated 28% of Nuristani voters will not be able to cast ballots.

RC-West

-- HERAT: In Herat, as of late evening, 17 polling centers are unlikely to open - 14 in Guzara district and three in Zarghun - as the IEC was unable to deliver election materials. However, the IEC still hopes to open at least some of these polling sites later in the day. In Shindand district, all polling sites have their materials and are scheduled to open with ANA and ANP at each location.

Fraud

¶7. (SBU) Dr. Abdullah's senior advisor Farid Zekria told us that Abdullah has over 25,000 candidate agents registered and has had no major problems deploying them, except for an issue in Kandahar where, he alleges, the IEC gave the vehicle permits for candidate agents to the chief of police who refused to give them to Abdullah's group. Zekria said he raised the issue with local and international authorities and believed it was going to be resolved.

RC-North

-- BALKH: Karzai's campaign manager in Balkh reported that insurgents have warned villagers in Qoland village, Sholgara district not to vote or to face "dire consequences."

RC-East

-- KHOST: Khost province has witnessed several incidents of voter intimidation. In Diel Puri village (on the border of Tani and Mandozai districts), armed men reportedly warned villagers not to vote. There were reports of 25 rockets stored in Sebari district that will be aimed at polling centers on August 20. Night letters were also distributed along the Tani-Gorbuz road warning people not to vote and indicating that anyone found with an ink-stained finger, would have that finger cut off before they are killed.

Atmospherics

¶8. (SBU) Regional reporting from key regions and provinces follows:

RC-NORTH

-- BALKH: Governor Mohammad Atta hosted an Afghan Independence Day dinner yesterday, attended by Abdullah's VP running mates Hamayon

Shaf Asefi (grandson of former king Zahir Shah) and Cheragh Ali Cheragh. In a private conversation, First VP running mate Asefi told State PRT officer that "it doesn't matter who wins as long as there's change." He said Karzai had stooped to new depths in allowing Dostum to return, and added that the only place that Dostum should be allowed to travel to is The Hague where he should be prosecuted for war crimes. Asefi said he thought Abdullah should have participated in the last debate with Karzai and Ghani. He said he was not aware of any talks that might be taking place between Abdullah and Junbesh's Sayed Noorullah, who has hinted that he might back another candidate if the election goes to a second round and Dostum is still in Afghanistan.

RC-SOUTH

-- KANDAHAR: The Kandahar Director of Public Health reports that Mirwais Hospital in Kandahar City has stocked up on blood and placed additional staff on stand-by. It has also coordinated with the World Health Organization, which reportedly is prepared to provide 10,000 basic health emergency kits in the event of mass casualties.

-- HELMAND: Governor Mangal said in a meeting with PRT officers that during his recent meeting with Karzai in Kabul, Karzai asked him if it was true that the Lashkar Gah PRT (meaning the UK) was paying people to vote for Ghani. Mangal insisted Karzai was serious about the question, which was likely planted by SMA, who blames the British for his own removal from Helmand two years ago.

RC-EAST

-- KUNAR: Asadabad (Kunar) is ready to vote. According to the local police chief, election security is not a problem. Visits by the PRT officer to four polling sites - three in downtown Asadabad and one in Shigal District - showed preparations were underway for voting. President Karzai is the overwhelming favorite not just in Asadabad but throughout Kunar Province. Though he is already the perceived winner by many, they say they are voting for him because he is a good man who has done much for the country. Though recent violence around the country is a concern for people here, at least in the city, it did not seem likely to stop anyone from voting.

-- ZABUL: All polling materials and staff are reported to have reached polling centers. Provincial council candidates submitted last minute requests to the governor for assistance in moving political party observers to polling centers, which was denied. The Governor, ANSF leadership, and local officials attended and spoke at the Independence Day ceremony at the ANA camp, which featured poetry recitals, dancing and religious sermons.

Public Affairs

IX. AFGHAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS:

Election preparations were the top story in the Afghan media for this reporting period. The IEC announced it has already delivered 80% of sensitive electoral materials to remote polling centers, with the remaining 20% on their way, but said security concerns kept election teams from opening polling centers in nine districts in southern Afghanistan.

Also receiving extensive coverage was the government's decree banning media from reporting violence on Election Day. The ban, issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, prohibits "broadcasting any incidence of violence" between 6am and 8pm on Election Day "to ensure the wide participation of the Afghan people." The edict was roundly criticized across the Afghan media; Rahimullah Samander, head of the Independent Journalist Association of Afghanistan, called it "unconstitutional censorship," and said Afghan journalists would continue to report as usual.

Radio Azadi reported two American soldiers have died as a result of an improvised explosive device (IED) attack on their patrol in southern Afghanistan, while in a separate attack two American soldiers were killed and at least three injured when their convoy

struck an IED in eastern Afghanistan.

Radio Azadi also reported that a tribal force captured more than a dozen Taliban fighters during an ongoing search operation in the Spin Ghar district of Nangarhar province. A tribal elder said his tribe is continuing the joint operation with Afghan National Police.

President Barack Obama's message of congratulations to the Afghan people on their Independence Day was carried widely by the Afghan media.

Ariana TV reported on General Dostum's reaction to expressions of concern from the United States and the international community over his possible involvement in human rights violations. Dostum reportedly said the U.S. should be happy he has returned, as he is the only friend America and NATO have, and that his coming back will contribute to peace and stability, adding "I want to sit with my American friends and make a plan so that, within two or three years, we will bring peace and security to all of Afghanistan." He was quoted as saying the United States of America and international friends should put together a commission to investigate the allegations and find the truth.

Shamshad TV reported that Akbarboi said he is going to file a complaint against Dostum through the Security Council at the International Court in the Hague.

The Elections Complaint Commission (ECC) fined Afghan state broadcaster RTA for showing President Karzai speaking after the official end of campaigning. Meanwhile, the IEC Media Monitoring Commission accused several private print and broadcast media outlets of violating the media code of conduct in the elections rules and regulations. Outlets accused include Noorin, Tamadun, Tolo and Shamshad.

VOA carried a live interview with Sima Samar, chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, on the amendment of Shiite family law ordered by President Karzai. Samar said there are still some technical problems, but welcomed the amendment now that the 13th article - "It is the responsibility of the wife to prepare for sexual satisfaction of her husband and not leave the house without permission, unless there is need or difficulty" - has been removed.

Radio Killid reported that Afghan police in Logar province seized a vehicle loaded with explosives.

Radio Azadi reported that 11 insurgents, including a commander, were killed in Uruzgan province.

Ariana TV reported that 22 polling centers in Kunduz will close due to security concerns.

¶9. (SBU) MESSAGING:

Messaging remains consistent with Afghan Elections Situation Report One. We will review and update as necessary for the next report.

EIKENBERRY